

Message not received

School officials say
they weren't warned
of bed bugs

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DUXBURY — If the people at Camp Cody told Nature's Classroom about the possibility of bedbugs there, that information never got to Duxbury, School Superintendent Dr. Benedict Tantillo said.

Nonetheless, he expects Duxbury will continue to take part in the Nature's Classroom program, just at a different location.

According to a phone message sent to parents Tuesday Oct. 19, bed bugs were found in cabins at the camp in Freedom, N.H., where the entire eighth grade and teachers spent three nights as part of the Nature's Classroom program.

One confirmed case of bedbugs, a student who was on the trip, has been reported, Tantillo said.

But who told whom what, and when, may never be resolved.

"Nature's Classroom withheld held no information concerning bed bugs to any of its client schools," Dr. John Santos, the director of the program, said.

"Someone should have been in contact," Middle School Principal Blake Dalton said.

"Everyone's pointing a finger," Tantillo said. But, he added, they weren't told about the potential problem until the buses were unloaded.

In fact, Dalton said, the buses were long gone by the time they were told anything.

Assistant Principal Donna Theodossiou was told one cabin had an issue with bed bugs, Dalton said, and it had been taken care of by a licensed exterminator.

"We would never put children at risk," Dalton said, noting that last year's trip was postponed due to swine flu. "The kids health and well-being is first and foremost."

This year though, by the time someone was told and could make a decision, getting the kids home was impossible. "We had 280 students with no way to transport

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them back, and a camp director saying everything's fine," Dalton said.

According to both Dalton and Tantillo, they were told that the camp cabins were searched for bedbugs Oct. 11, the day before the students arrived. In a conversation Tuesday with Phillip Ross, director of Camp Cody, Dalton said he learned more about what happened. Ross told him that he was told Oct. 12 that a student who had been there the week before had been reported with bug bites. That morning, the cabin the student had stayed in was checked for bedbugs, as the Duxbury students were rolling north.

"My administrative team was assured all cabins were clear and safe," Dalton said.

One thing everyone seemed to agree on is that bedbugs are a widespread problem. "This is an epidemic," said Tantillo, who noted that bedbugs have been found in luxury hotels in New York. Santos echoed Tantillo's words, "Bedbugs are everywhere."

Despite it all, Dalton said, no one wants to end Duxbury's participation in the Nature's Classroom program. Parents he has spoken to say they don't want the trips to end, noting the memories and friendships that have been formed, and the unity it brings to the students.